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CRICKETS IN THE HOME

Prepared by the
Division of Insects Affecting Man and Animals

Crickets are not normally household pests. They do, however, enter houses in varying numbers, sometimes in tremendous hordes. In some localities crickets are annual pests, being particularly annoying during July, August, and September. They can ruin clothing of wool, cotton, linen, rayon, and silk, and even leather goods such as shoes, by eating irregular holes in them. Often their chirping and wide distribution around the houses are very exasperating to the housewife. Two species are most frequently found--the field cricket (Acheta assimilis F.) and its varieties, and the house cricket (A. domestica (L.)).

Field Crickets

Field crickets are $\frac{3}{5}$ to 1 inch in length when fully grown. They multiply out of doors, where they feed upon all sorts of vegetation, being at times very destructive to such crops as strawberries and tomatoes. As summer advances and vegetation becomes less succulent or abundant, the crickets seek new quarters. In doing this they may enter houses, especially loosely constructed cottages near woods or along the seashore, or other dwellings near weed-grown city lots, or in cultivated fields or fields from which the harvest has been removed.

Throughout the Northern States field crickets may be in the adult stage from July until heavy frosts kill them. Shortly before death the females lay their eggs singly in the soil. One female has been known to lay as many as 808 eggs, but the number usually ranges from about 150 to 400. These eggs hatch during May and June. In the warmer climate of the Gulf coast eggs laid in May hatch in about 21 days at 70° F., and in July in 9 days at 81°. In the South the young crickets require 8 weeks for development as compared with 9 to 14 weeks farther north.

House Crickets

The light brown or tan house crickets are $3/4$ to 1 inch in length when mature. They are common house pests in Europe, but in this country they also thrive out of doors. They are most troublesome in houses located near city dumps or other areas being filled in with refuse. In the hollow spaces within such dumps the crickets find many places to hide and multiply, and the refuse itself furnishes sufficient food for their development. The house crickets swarm from dumps at about dusk, and fly or crawl to houses. They may crawl to houses in multitudes and gain access to the interior through small openings in walls and roofs or through windows and doors not perfectly screened. Sometimes they can be swept up by the painful. This migration from dumps to houses usually occurs during July to September.

In large modern housing projects, in a mild climate, the house cricket may become a year-around nuisance except in midwinter, and may overwinter in all stages of growth. Generally crickets make their appearance in such buildings during April and May. They seek a good harborage beneath the buildings in the unexcavated areas through which the heating pipes pass, and migrate thence to apartments along the plumbing or conduits for various installations.

Control

Whatever species of cricket becomes annoying in a house or neighborhood, the control is the same.

In the house.--Naturally the closing of all openings and the tightening of screens, windows, doors, etc., is an aid in preventing entry of crickets. Once within the house, a few crickets can be killed with fly swatters. But since they hide in inaccessible places and come out to crawl about when it is dark, the use of dusts or poisoned baits will prove valuable.

Any good commercial fly spray with an oil base will kill crickets that are hit by the spray, but will have no effect upon others that may arrive later. Sprays having a residual effect may become available soon, but not during 1945.

Liberal dusting of floors along the baseboards with fresh pyrethrum powder, sodium fluosilicate, or sodium fluoride, or blowing these powders with a hand bellows into cracks and other hiding places will kill crickets. Pyrethrum powder is not now (1945) available, but sodium fluosilicate and sodium fluoride can be obtained. They are poisons and must be used with caution.

When houses are overrun with crickets, a poisoned bait has proved an effective control. A good bait can be made by mixing 2 1/2 pounds of bran, 10 teaspoonfuls of sodium fluoride or sodium fluosilicate, 4/5 cup of molasses, and 1 quart of water. Small lots of this bait should be scattered in various parts of the house, including the basement, where crickets are known to crawl. Being poisonous, the bait should not be exposed where children or pets can eat it.

Out of doors.--When crickets are numerous about the house and are constantly gaining entrance, killing them out of doors is the best method of attack. The poisoned bait can be used successfully about yards and house foundations, and over dumps. If the crickets are coming from a dump, the town or city authorities should be held responsible for treating the dump heavily with the bait several times a week until the cricket migrations end. The poison bait should be applied to the dumps late in the day as the crickets are about to emerge from their hiding places for their evening activities. A practical formula for making such a bait for outdoor use is as follows: 25 pounds of bran, 1 pound of sodium fluoride or sodium fluosilicate, 2 quarts of molasses, and 2 1/2 gallons of water.

Covering dumps to a depth of 6 inches with clean earth or ashes will destroy cricket infestations. Fumigating dumps with calcium cyanide applied by a professional fumigator has proved effective in cricket control in some instances and is useful also in killing rats.

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